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ABSTRACT

Two manuals address self-advocacy and assertiveness training for college students with language learning disabilities (LD) and their tutors. Part I examines the positive use of assertiveness and self-advocacy. Assertiveness is distinguished from aggressiveness, and the importance of assertiveness in the lives of LD college students is underlined. Self-advocacy is viewed as a cycle containing four stages: targeting, preparing, influencing, and following up. Part II presents a transcript from a video tape describing a self-advocacy procedure for LD students in dealing with potentially negative situations. Examples are provided of how to target the needs of a particular situation, prepare to meet those needs, manipulate those factors which influence the success or failure of the student's interactions, and obtain closure. Students are shown how to analyze their strengths and weaknesses and systematically apply the principles of self-advocacy. Three simulations illustrate common problems facing LD persons in educational and employment settings. (CL)

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Postsecondary Intervention Model for Learning Disabilities
The Barkley Memorial Center
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

SELF-ADVOCACY AND ASSERTIVENESS FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENT

and

How to Use Self-Advocacy Skills

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Study Manual #4 and Study Manual #4, Part II
August, 1985

For PS IM LD:

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Mary J. Morris
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Prepared with funds from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education (Grant #G008435130)

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SELF-ADVOCACY AND ASSERTIVENESS FOR THE
LEARNING DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENT

Part I

The ability to use techniques of assertiveness and self-advocacy is important for everyone. For a learning disabled (LD) person, the capacity to use assertiveness and self-advocacy skills is essential. Circumstances surrounding the learning disabled person may frequently demand those positive behaviors.

Before a person can learn and use the skills required to be an assertive self-advocate, there are necessary prerequisites: A person must have developed a comfortable level of self-esteem and self-understanding. Learning disabled persons must understand the learning disabilities they have. It is helpful to have knowledge of laws and public policies which support them because they have learning disabilities. They need a willingness to discuss their learning disabilities with others and to ask for accomodations and assistance when necessary. Learning disabled people who have reached these points will be better prepared for the variety of responses they will receive from persons with whom they interact.

High levels of motivation, resiliency, consistency and persistence are required for the learning disabled persons to be successful in withstanding possible negative experiences with others. The pain one may experience may result in development of learned helplessness responses and/or giving up.

The learning disabled person who feels internally self-assured is less likely to feel defeated after experiencing an external insult. Those of us who can effectively weather the 'self' generated and 'other' generated pressures they experience, are more likely to succeed in all arenas of life.

One does not have to be born with the ability to respond to these life pressures. The skills needed are not gifts to the chosen few. Self-advocacy and assertiveness skills can be learned and will facilitate successful survival in relationships for the learning disabled individual (or any person).

Persons with learning disabilities are in potentially vulnerable positions when relating with others. Use of assertiveness and self-advocacy skills can provide protection from people who view learning disabled persons as unsuited for the academic demands of college and/or assume that the learning disabled student will be limited in the abilities needed to establish future economic and social independence.

Students with learning disabilities report that they experience high stress while in college. The 'self' and 'other' inflicted demands for academic success are so potent and frequent that learning disabled students may ignore attempting success in other arenas of life. A singular focus on grades, as the primary measure of academic success and self-esteem, may create a false positive picture. Attention to social, emotional, vocational, and related areas of personal growth may alter the overall view of the learning disabled person's success.

Difficulties experienced by persons with learning disabilities can create a stigma, "an undesired differentness" (Stigma, 1963, p. 5). As a result, learning disabled students sometimes choose to hide or 'pass' while at college. They do this by choosing not to disclose their experience with learning disabilities to others. Reluctance to discuss one's learning disability can jeopardize success in academic, social, and employment ventures. A clear understanding of the disability and its effects may increase acceptance of and comfort with one's self. Differences between and among persons with learning disabilities, and those without LD, may become evident in poorly developed social communication skills.

Verbal/non-verbal communication between learning disabled persons and others is often poorly delivered, as well as received. Messages sent by LD persons may contain inappropriate word choices and inappropriate vocal inflections which do not communicate the intent of their message correctly. Messages may not communicate situation-appropriate emotion. Their communication proficiency may appear immature. They may speak too loudly or interrupt others while they are speaking. Difficulties in non-verbal communication may be evidenced by standing too close (or too far away), from the person with whom they are speaking. An intended "pat on the back" or an attempt at gentle affection may not actually be gentle. The learning disabled person may not look at the person to whom they are speaking or may miss subtle facial expressions and/or body postural cues which assist him/her in interpreting a message. Sitting or standing still while speaking or listening may also be difficult for a learning disabled person. Each of these behaviors, alone or in concert, verbal or non-verbal, may create internal and/or external confusion for the listener, as well as for the learning disabled sender of the message involved.

The non-learning disabled person who receives communication from learning disabled persons may not understand learning disabilities. As a result, many interactions between the two may be incorrectly perceived. Frustration, anger, and miscommunication may be common. The learning disabled person who is aware of the difficulties that can occur between themselves and others can be in a position of strength rather than a position of potential vulnerability in social interactions.

Appropriate skills in assertiveness and self-advocacy can provide the students effective strategies for intergrating their social and academic needs with their situational realities. This article, and the related video tape (refer to Part II), illustrate positive use of assertiveness and self-advocacy. Effective and ineffective examples are given, as are examples of

non-assertiveness and aggressiveness. The relationship between assertiveness and self-advocacy is demonstrated through simulation activities presented in Part II.

Assertiveness has been defined by Alberti and Emmons (1974) as "the right to be, and to express himself [herself] and to feel good (not guilty) about doing so, as long as he [she] does not hurt others in the process" (p. 6).

Non-assertiveness people do not use self-expression. Assertiveness is not to be confused with aggressiveness. Aggressive people use self-expression in ways which may achieve the results they desire, yet aggressive self-expression may cause pain for the receiver of the message.

The following chart provided by Alberti and Emmons in Your Perfect Right (1974, p. 11) illustrates the results of non-assertive, agressive, and assertive behavior. The chart examines the perspectives of both the message sender ('As Actor') and the message receiver ('As Acted Upon').

NON-ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR	AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR	ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR
As Actor [Message Sender]	As Actor [Message Sender]	As Actor [Message Sender]
Self-denying	Self-enhancing at expense of another	Self-enhancing
Inhibited Hurt, anxious	Expressive Depreciates others	Expressive Feels good about self
Allows others to choose for him	Chooses for others	Chooses for self
Does not achieve desired goal	Achieves desired goal by hurting others	May achieve desired goal
As Acted Upon [Message Receiver]	As Acted Upon [Message Receiver]	As Acted Upon [Message Receiver]
Guilty or angry	Self-denying	Self-enhancing
Depreciates actor	Hurt, defensive, humiliated	Expressive
Achieves desired goal at actor's expense	Does not achieve desired goal	May achieve desired goal

Note: Reference to the chart above will be made in the video tape and in Part II. The reader-observer may wish to refer to the chart while watching the tape.

Assertiveness is one component of a repertoire of self-advocacy skills that can be used to express and satisfy personal needs. There are many definitions of self-advocacy. A simple descriptor is assertiveness plus (italics mine). Supported by principles, practices and procedures mandated by law, self-advocacy is carried out through use of skills demanded in proficient interpersonal communication.

When speaking of 'principles, practices, and procedures mandated by law', one is reminded of legislation such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Developmental Disabilities and Bill of Rights Act, which grant certain privileges and rights to persons with learning disabilities and other handicapping conditions. Even when rights and privileges are mandated by law, it is the responsibility of the individual to protect and exercise those rights and privileges. When a person's education, employment, housing, and lifestyle need to be established and maintained, the only choice that anyone has, handicapped or not, is to be assertive and use self-advocacy skills. Existing legal support for any situation is ineffective when it is not utilized.

Self-advocacy works through use of problem analysis, problem solution, decision making and negotiating skills. The most accomplished self-advocates are at ease with themselves, the situations they encounter, and the skills demanded of them when they must speak out in their own behalf.

One can easily see the relationship of assertive behavior to self-advocacy when the "Self-Advocacy Cycle," as developed by Apolloni (1984) p. 1, is examined:

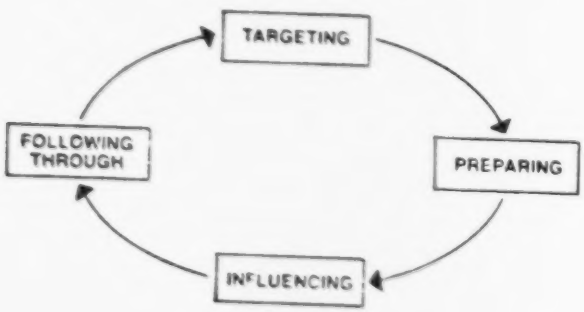
The self-advocacy cycle includes four stages:

1. **Targeting.** The process of identifying individual or family needs and the service agencies, if any, responsible to address these needs.

2. **Preparing.** The process of preparing to participate with service professionals in decision making sessions on how best to meet identified needs.

3. **Influencing.** The process of influencing decision makers within service agencies to adopt the self-advocate's desired approaches for addressing individual and family needs.

4. **Following up.** The process of checking to be certain that the agreements made by self-advocates and service professionals are carried out.



Note: The stages referred to above will be explained through examples found on the video tape. The reader-observer may wish to refer to the chart while watching the tape and while using Part II.

NOTE TO THE READER

Each author cited here has presented extensive examples and/or information in their own writings. The resources listed below are for the reader's further investigation. They are available in the PS IM LD project office.

RESOURCES

(Note: Those items followed by an asterisk are cited in Part I.)

Apolloni, T. (1984). Self-advocacy: how to be a winner. National Information Center for Handicapped Children and Youth, p. 1.*

Alberti, R. E. and Emmons, M. L. (1974). Your Perfect Right (2nd ed.). San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact. p. 11.*

Brown, D. (1984). Self-help groups for learning disabled people and the rehabilitation process. Journal of Rehabilitation, pp. 91-92.

Brown, D. (1984). Independent Living Ideas Marketing Your Disability and Yourself. Washington, D.C. President's Committee on Handicapped Children and Youth Employment of the Handicapped.

Goffman, Erving. (1963). Stigma. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. p. 6.*

Wigg, E. H. and E. Semel. (1984). Language Assessment and Intervention for for the Learning Disabled. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company. Ch. 4.

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Campus

Ombudsman 472-3633
Lyman Hall
Ombudsman - Robert Filbeck
Assistant - Faye Moulton
City Campus 68588-0344

Student Legal Services 472-3350
Nebraska Union 335
Lawyer - Shelly Stall
City Campus 68588-0461

PS IM LD 472-5530
250A Barkley Memorial Center
Jan Leuenberger, Mary Morris
East Campus 68583-0731

Handicapped Services Officer
Brad Munn 472-3417
103 Teachers College
City Campus 68588-0437

Community

NE Advocacy Services for
Developmentally Disabled
Citizens 474-3183
Director - Tim Shaw
Case Advocate - Deb Brownyard
215 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln Center Building
Room 422
Lincoln, NE 68508

League of Human Dignity 474-0820
Nancy Erickson
Independent Living Center
1423 "O" Street
Lincoln, NE 68508

ACLD - Association for Children and
Adults with Learning Disabilities
Linda Voricek 435-2305 after 4 p.m.
1421 Fairfield
Lincoln, NE 68508

Postsecondary Intervention Model for Learning Disabilities
Barkley Memorial Center
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

HOW TO USE SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

Adapted from a script by Diane R. Greenlee

Developed by the Postsecondary Intervention Model for Learning Disabilities

(12 minutes, Color, VHS)

(Prepared with funds from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education - Grant #G008435130)

Study Manual #4, Part II
April, 1987

For PS IM LD

Nancy J. Egly
Janice E. Leuenberger
Mary J. Morris
Julie M. Geis

SELF-ADVOCACY AND ASSERTIVENESS FOR
THE LEARNING DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENT

Part II: Simulation Activities

This transcript has been prepared to accompany the video tape and working paper on Self-Advocacy and Assertiveness. The video tape describes a self-advocacy procedure for LD students to follow as they improve their ability to deal with potentially negative situations in a positive manner. Examples are provided of how to target the needs of a particular situation, prepare to meet those needs, manipulate those factors which influence the success or failure of the student's interactions, and obtain closure. Students are shown how to analyze their strengths and weaknesses and systematically apply the principles of self-advocacy. Three simulations are provided illustrating common problems which LD students may experience in an educational and employment setting.

SELF ADVOCACY: THE VIDEO TAPE

Narrator on camera.
Neutral background.
Medium close-up.

NARRATOR: The topic of discussion is self-advocacy. What is self-advocacy? It is the ability of a person to look after his/her own interests, to present or defend his/herself in the most positive manner by capitalizing on personal strengths, to downplay weaknesses, and resolve problems. All of us encounter situations which require that we stand up for ourselves. It is important that each of us understands how to be a good self-advocate and avoid interactions which are perceived as too aggressive or too passive. Individuals with learning disabilities, in particular, need to be

Dolly in for close-up.

effective self-advocates at school, work, and in their personal interactions.

Dissolve to prepared visual "self-advocacy cycle."

Self-advocacy works through the use of problem analysis. Problem analysis includes four steps: targeting needs, preparing to meet the needs, influencing or negotiating change and following through.

Fade to mid close-up of narrator.
Neutral background.

In order to develop self-advocacy skills, an individual must know his/her strengths and weaknesses. Being knowledgeable about his/her rights, makes it possible to judge when the use

of self-advocacy skills is advisable. Positive self-advocates utilize problem-solving analysis to protect and ensure their rights as students, learning disabled persons, consumers, and human beings. Let's devise a list of strengths and weaknesses which an individual might use in problem analysis.

Pan - narrator moves to flip chart. Dissolve to prepared visual.

Strengths
Friendly smile
Firm handshake
Good posture
Easy to talk with

As strengths, for example, do you have a warm and friendly smile. . . a firm handshake. . . good posture? Are you easy to talk with? Are you interested in other people's hobbies? Often strengths are hard to list.

Back to mid close-up of narrator.

Now let's identify personal characteristics that seem to be easier to find. List your weaknesses. Human beings seem to be good at finding fault with themselves. But instead of getting carried away with this weakness "business," keep your list of weaknesses limited to the top five or six.

Pan - narrator to flip chart. Dissolve to prepared visual.

Weaknesses
Late
Talk a lot
Lose things

Weaknesses might include: Perpetually late. . . talk a lot but don't say much. . . leave things places/lose things. . . bull-in-a-china shop. . rotten at math. . . disorganized.

Back to narrator with flip chart. Mid close-up

Now that you know how to list your strengths and major weaknesses, you can begin to follow the

steps for problem analysis which lead to improved self-advocacy skills. Your weaknesses are often the first step to problem-solving. That is: targeting your needs, maximizing your strengths, and minimizing the effects of your

Close-up of narrator.

weaknesses. The following sketches will demonstrate how the self-advocacy cycle helps individuals develop solutions to problems through utilization of their strengths and weaknesses.

(Voice over) students seated in classroom. Close-up of notebook on desk.

Here is an example, Targeted Need: Leaving something behind. It is 11:10 a.m. when you remember that you have left your notebook in your last classroom. A class is meeting in that room until noon. The term paper in your notebook must be turned in at 11:30 a.m. - no excuses.

Back to full shot of classroom group.

In preparing to meet the need of this student, what factors may influence the situation to make the outcome desirable to the student and the class teacher? Do you have personal strengths that could help in this situation which would allow you to resolve the problem by being a positive self-advocate?

Personal Strengths: Warm friendly smile, good manners, able to admit a mistake. Here's one option for utilizing strengths to produce a

resolution to the problem via positive self-advocacy.

Student enters classroom scene.

STUDENT: Pardon me for interrupting your class. I left my notebook in this classroom. It is the orange one on that chair. Would someone hand it to me, please? I would not have interrupted your class if I did not have to turn in this paper at 11:30 a.m. Thank you.

Mid close-up of narrator with neutral background.

NARRATOR: This student was assertive in using personal strengths to achieve the desired result, and feels good about herself.

The disruption she created was minimal.

But what could have happened if this student had not taken time to search for useful strengths to negotiate the best solution to the problem?

One weakness can add to another to make a bad situation worse. An aggressive solution or "bull-in-a-china-shop" response to the targeted need: "leaving something behind," served only to upset people.

Back to classroom. Pan to see student entering.

STUDENT: Excuse me. Sorry. (Class group is distracted, giggles).

(Voice over) Full classroom remains on camera.

NARRATOR: The class and the instructor have been victimized by the self-centered aggressive

behavior of the student. The student is left feeling bad and mad because she carried out actions characterized by a weakness not a strength.

Let's recall what happened when the student focused on his personal strengths to deal with the situation.

Self-advocacy, assertiveness, using your list of personal strengths to problem-solve makes a positive difference.

Narrator in background.

Here is another example of targeting needs, preparing to resolve the problem and following through.

Disorganized student situation in foreground.

Weakness: Disorganization. Targeted Need: For what seems like the 20th time this semester you have had to spend half of the weekend's study time trying to find the notes you need to work on a project for Professor Barker's class. You have looked through all your notebooks, your desk, your briefcase, and all your coat pockets. No notes!

Narrator moves in to take seat next to student.

NARRATOR: There certainly appears to be a problem that needs solving.

Narrator and student together at desk in student office.

STUDENT: Right, but I think I know how I'm going to do it. I like art.

NARRATOR: Art?

STUDENT: Yes, art. You know, painting... watercolor...watercolor...

NARRATOR: What's that got to...

STUDENT: Shhhhh! I'm thinking...Color...My project notes! I knew they were here somewhere!

NARRATOR: You have sorted papers before and been able to find what you needed. What makes you think you have a solution to this problem?

STUDENT: This time I am taking the time to mark each piece of paper I save with the name of the class or project; and from now on I am going to take the notes for each class or project with different colored ink and keep them in folders of that same color. Then I can tell at a glance which notes belong where.

NARRATOR: Different colors?

STUDENT: Um-hum. I like art. I notice colors. I hope that the different colors of ink will remind me how important it is for me to put the

notes away in the proper folder as soon as I am done using them.

NARRATOR: That sounds pretty far fetched to me.

STUDENT: It is unconventional, I admit. If it does not work perfectly, it did not cost anything. If it helps... (pauses thoughtfully) If it does not work, I will come up with something else. I may be disorganized but one of my personal strengths is persistance.

Visual sub-typing "Following through"

Now, I'm going to finish the project Professor Barker assigned.

Narrator - mid close-up, neutral background.

NARRATOR: That is problem-solving. In this situation, the student used problem-solving ability to handle the consequences of the weakness, disorganization. Problem-solving is assertive behavior/acting as a self-advocate to capitalize on your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. Let's look at another reaction to a problem. In this situation, the person uses a non-assertive response. Similar to an aggressive response to a problem, a non-assertive response to a problem may be ineffectual.

Dissolve to close-up of narrator.

Back to disorganized student office.

FRIEND: I thought you were supposed to be in Barker's class now?

STUDENT: Yeh...well, I lost my notes again over the weekend. Since I could not find my notes, I couldn't finish the project. And, since I could not have the project finished I had to skip class. I'll turn the project in late, I guess.

Visual sub-typing over "non-assertive"

Professor Barker will take off a lot of points because of it being late.

(Voice over) Students in office stay on camera.

NARRATOR: Non-assertive behavior, like agressive behavior, makes a bad situation worse, leaving this student feeling degraded and depressed because the problem wasn't solved.

Let us look at one last example.

Narrator on location in library.

Weakness: Poor sequencing ability.

Situation: You need a temporary job to finance car repairs. The only job that is available immediately is to fill in for an employee on sick leave at a branch library. Your job is reshelving books.

When you arrive for your first evening of work, note pad in hand, the librarian, Ms. Steffens, says:

Actors in library.

MS. STEFFENS: Just arrange these piles of books in order on the dolly, according to reference number, and then wheel the dolly up and down the

book stacks, reshelving them in the proper location as you do. It's all very basic; you won't be needing to write anything.

(Voice over) Student in library.

NARRATOR: If you want to keep this job, you will have to speak out on your behalf - use your self-advocate skills.

Student actor in library.

STUDENT (in library speaking to himself): I need the money, so I need this job. I know I can do this job, with the aid of a note pad. What I need to do is to influence Ms. Steffens to allow me to try it my way long enough to demonstrate that I'm capable of meeting her expectations.

(Voice over) Maintain camera on actors in library.

NARRATOR: Self-advocacy requires assertive but positive behavior. What can you do to influence Ms. Steffens? How can you negotiate?

These are strengths that are important to an employer. Maybe they will be more important to Ms. Steffens than the method you use to reshelve books. Let's see...

Back to actors in library. Mid close-up of the two.

STUDENT: Ms. Steffens, as I told you yesterday, I'm really happy that you hired me to fill in here. I really need the money to get my car fixed before I go back to college. I think you should know, I have a learning disability, and

I've always had a lot of difficulty mentally ordering things. I have to recite the entire alphabet in my head in order to tell which of two letters comes first. With the alphabet written down on this note pad, however, I can check the sequence of letters and alphabetize as quickly as anyone else. Would you be willing to let me try it my way for an evening before you decide to hire someone else?

MS. STEFFENS: Well, it doesn't seem as if your learning difficulty has been that much of a problem to you here. Accuracy is really far more important than speed in this job, and, so far, every returned book that I've checked has been exactly where it's supposed to be. It is a relief to be able to get someone to fill in here on such short notice.

STUDENT: Thanks, Ms. Steffens. I appreciate you giving me a chance at this. This job came along at just the right time for me, too, so I'm looking forward to being here for the next week or two.

Narrator - neutral background. Use of visual self-advocacy cycle.

NARRATOR: Self-advocacy is speaking out assertively on your own behalf and learning how to utilize your strengths to minimize your weaknesses. The self-advocacy cycle includes

these four stages: targeting needs, preparing to meet the needs, influencing decision makers, and following up the decision.

Back to mid close-up of narrator.

Let's look again at how this last example fits into the self-advocacy cycle.

Fade to visual with money-notebook-discussion restate overlay on self-advocacy cycle.

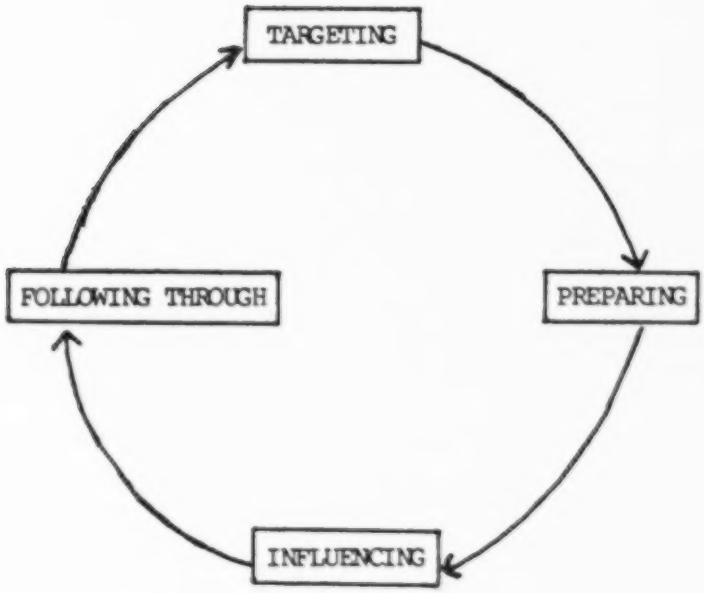
This student needed money (his target); so, he needed the job. He was prepared to meet the job accurately by using his own aids. He influenced Ms. Steffens to keep him on the job and to allow him to use the prompts necessary. She restated the work schedule he had been assigned to follow up.

Back to narrator. Neutral background.

Self-advocacy can work for you if you know your strengths and your weaknesses, and use what you know to make a positive difference in the difficult situations that arise in your life. Because you have a learning disability, you may have a greater need to use self-advocacy skills. People don't automatically know how to be effective self-advocates—it takes practice. When faced with difficult situations, remember the four steps of the self-advocacy cycle.

Credits.

Self-Advocacy Cycle (Visual)



developed by Apolloni (1984)